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## Age-psychological characteristics of inmates

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### Abstract

This article presents a conceptual model of age-psychological characteristics of inmates and their role in the penitentiary treatment process and the correction of various categories of offenders. It especially analyses the age- psychological specifics of minors, youths, adults and older people serving sentences, the problems in their regime treatment, correctional work and employment. We propose psychologically based recommendations for the treatment and correction of sentenced minors and prisoners in adolescent, youth, adult and old age.

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**Keywords:** age-psychological characteristics (values, attitudes, motives, psychological conditions, self-esteem); penitentiary treatment and correction; the regime treatment; educational-corrective activity.

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### 1. Topicality of the problem

More than 30 recommendations of the Council of Europe present a too differentiated view to the treatment of different age categories of prisoners: adolescents, young and adults (Stratiev, 2011). Furthermore, in Recommendation Rec (2003) 23 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the management of prisoners serving life sentences and other long-term ones by the prison administrations, in particular, in Article 28 was stated that older prisoners should be assisted to maintain good levels of physical and mental health (Closed case, 2012, 2). Given this intensive European attention to the age characteristics of different groups of prisoners, which naturally presupposes their psychological interpretation it is very strange that a careful reading of the Penal Code, the Law on Punishments Execution and its Enforcement Rules we cannot find a single text dedicated to the age-psychological

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specifics of convicts. A review of publications in penal and penitentiary-psychological publications shows a complete lack of interest in the age-psychological matter.

Meanwhile, in the immediate penitentiary practice constantly appear different difficulties associated with the regime treatment of minors and elderly prisoners, as well as with their employment engagement against the very limited production resources. The optimisation of educational-correctional work with convicts where the individual approach is more fully present (Traykov, 2007; Kovachev & Madjarov 1990) requires in-depth study of age-psychological features of different generational segments of the prisons population. All mentioned trends determine the need for conceptual reflection of the age-psychological characteristics of prisoners in the context of their penitentiary treatment and correction.

## 2. Methodology

I present my experience in the creation of a conceptual model for full understanding and use in the process of Bulgarian penitentiary treatment and re-socialization correction of the age-psychological characteristics of inmates. It was constructed by a comparative analysis and theoretical generalizations mainly on Bulgarian literary sources in the field of psychology, criminology, penology and criminal law enforcement. The proposed conceptual model is empirically based on data from a qualitative analysis of a large amount of observations, psycho-diagnostic tests and consultations with prisoners of different ages, which are part of my personal archive as of continuous work as penitentiary psychologist. I have used the results of psychodiagnosis and observations of over 230 convicted juveniles residing in the correctional facility for boys in the town of Boychinovtsi for the period from 1994 to 2010, as well as 200 imprisoned youths, 130 convicted adults and 150 elderly people, serving their sentences in prisons and prison hostels of indoor and outdoor type for men in the cities of Burgas, Varna, Plovdiv, Sofia, Stara Zagora, Trojan for the period 1997 to 2013.

The theoretical justification of the conceptual model is built on the analysis and summary of 23 literary sources, presenting psychological, socio-demographic and criminological characteristics of the age specifics of convicted and their values, attitudes, self-esteem, mental states.

The main hypothesis of this study is summarized as follows: We assume that the age-psychological characteristics of inmates pose particular problems at their residence in the places of imprisonment, which requires their full reporting and organizing a relevant penitentiary treatment and correctional work with the convicted minors, young people, adults and the elderly.

From the main hypothesis of this theoretical and methodological study logically results the formulation of its tasks which are presented in the following sequence:

- Outlining age-psychological specificity of minors, youth, adult and older people whose effective convictions are executed in places of imprisonment.
- Psychological interpretation of issues emerging in the process of penitentiary treatment of minors, youth, adult and elderly prisoners determined by their particular age-psychological profile.
- Development of psychological recommendations for optimizing the treatment in places of detention of convicted minors, young, adult and elderly convicted with a full account of their age-psychological characteristics.

The theoretical and empirical verification of the hypothesis and objectives of the present study suggests the use of the following methods:

- Analysis of international legal-penal documents and penitentiary psychological publications represented in the issues of the applied science bulletin "Closed case" for the period from 1995 to 2015.
- Analysis and interpretation of literary psychological, criminological and sociological sources associated with age-psychological problems.
- Extrapolation of ideas and productions on the age-psychological profile of the respondents from the general psychology and developmental psychology on offenders in the field of penitentiary psychology.
- Study of the current reports of Chief Directorate "Execution of Sentences" for the period from 2009 to 2014.

- Systematization of the reflected 700 cases of psychodiagnostics, consultancy and observations in my personal archive from the places of detention, with a focus on age-psychological characteristics of different categories of prisoners.

### **3. Structural and substantial components of the conceptual model**

#### **3.1. Personal-psychological portrait and treatment of minor prisoners**

##### *3.1.1. Psychological portrait*

The penitentiary treatment of minor offenders is fully regulated by law starting from the specifics of their age compared with adult prisoners (Palikarski, 1997; Traykov, 2007). However, the very process of the treatment carrying out is too complicated and the legal framework only outlines its limits, while in the contents aspect it insufficiently corresponds with the age- psychological specifics of minors convicted. It is currently well developed by developmental psychology (Kalchev, 2005; Dimitrov, 2007), criminal psychology (Gaydarov, 2007) and penitentiary psychology (Madzharov, 2006).

With the convicted minor offenders crises of emancipation, sexuality and identity run complicated (Achkova, 2001). As a result of these three crises emerges a new model of values, the heterosexual orientation is realized and the discovery of one's own personality. With the minor offenders in penitentiary institutions the crisis of emancipation is accompanied by much negativity, destructive protest behaviour and active imitation of criminal behaviour patterns (Gaydarov, 2007; Madzharov, 2006). In juvenile deviants often occurs early sexual life and sexual behaviour deviation. (Dmitriev & Kazak, 2007). The personal identity of minors incarcerated, as E. Eriksson points out, keeps its diffusivity as they keep their infantilism, structuring inadequate self-esteem and by all means try to attract attention from others and to highlight their own superiority. The adverse developments represented among minors convicted experiencing effective penalties in reformatories deepen and intensify due to the presence among them of epileptoid, demonstrative, sensitive and emotionally unstable accentuation of character. (Lichko, 1999 ).

Penitentiary isolation with its typical limitations causes amplification of psychological predisposition of minor prisoners to aggressive behaviour. Among them the cult of power is established and violence becomes the preferred way for self-affirmation and protection of one's reputation and status in the small group (Pirozhkov, 2001; Dmitriev & Kazak, 2007). The minors' values are associated with worship of courage and determination in the criminal activity, with aggression towards members of other groups and with increased loyalty to its members. They are less sensitive to different types of corrective and educational effects, but are too involved in the criminal subculture, idle pastime and engaging with various entertainments and delights in the medium of their peers. Typical psychiatric conditions in minor convicts are the tense anticipation, sadness, desperation, hopelessness and frustration. They often change to elation, excitement, tenacity. In this sense, the mental states of juvenile prisoners are dynamic, ambivalent and contradictory (Uzunova, 2003; Madzharov, 2006).

##### *3.1.2. Treatment*

The complex age-psychological characteristic, inherent for convicted minors and the adverse impacts on them of the penitentiary environment determine the need for complex influence on their personality. The regimen treatment, socio-educational activities and their work engagement should contribute to the building of adequate and responsible attitude towards their own future. They have to targeted contribute to the formation of normal relations with their peers and with adults, to build a balanced and realistic self-assessment and neutralize character accentuations. The basic correction purposes indicated can be achieved through systematic specialized consultative correction actions for positive development of self-concept and value-motivation system. Their successful implementation implies the development of communication skills and behavioural repertoire, participation in general education and vocational training programs, development of skill and work habits, rationalization of leisure time through involvement in sporting, cultural and information events, participation in community self-management (Uzunova, 2003).

### 3.1.3. *Expected results*

The integrated penitentiary treatment, providing intensive daily engagement must ensure personal growth, full development of cognitive and emotional sphere, stabilization of self-assessment and acquisition of habits and patterns of complete communication and meaningful spending of personal leisure time.

## 3.2. **Personal-psychological portrait and treatment of convicted youths**

### 3.2.1. *Psychological portrait*

In the young age (19-35 years) the personality structuring is completed and a person starts more realistically to perceive the surrounding reality and more maturely and critically to manage one's own behaviour. This is the age of activity, for which a number of authors highlight the existence of expressed physical and intellectual opportunities, as well as the commitment to personal life plans and social causes (Hadjiolova et al., 1984; Achkova, 2001; Minchev, 2013). Meanwhile, the personality of this age period is characterized by inconsistency, because it combines the features of adolescence and adulthood (Dmitriev & Kazak, 2007). On the other hand, the rapid development of people over the age range considered is associated with disharmony, increased tenacity, pretentiousness, maximalism and striving to deal with more challenges, initiating intense adrenaline experiences (Gaydarov, 2007).

Persons in young age are the largest group in the prison population. They have higher claims, inadequate self-control and systematic alcohol and drugs abuse (Madzharov, Nikolova & Boev, 2003). Despite these features, young people in places of detention are concerned about their social perspectives, but they often identify them with the criminal lifestyle which for them acts as a very significant personal value. Their yearning for grouping and their attraction to the opposite sex seriously affect their actual behaviour. Some of the young people also show willingness to exercise situational homosexual practices under the conditions of sexual deprivation.

Prison peculiarly formats value orientations of those convicted of young age. They strive to adapt to prisoners' environment, to protect their status in it and gain support by the respective small group. Moreover, some of them show instability and volatility, and another part is characterized by aggression, cynicism and orientation to the criminal romantics and tradition. The last group of inmates demonstrated, as evidenced by their psycho-diagnostic tests, increased self-esteem and significant volitional resistance.

Foks (1980) and Deev (1986) rightly noted that in the period from 26 to 30 years of age fatigue is observed in part of the recidivists and they rethink their past lives, review their criminal attitudes and try to end their criminal career. My own observations confirm the topicality of these findings for the age group in consideration.

Young prisoners are characterized by increased anxiety, worry and frustration upon joining the penitentiary institution in the period before being released therefrom. During the main period of serving the sentence boredom, apathy, frustration, irritability are typical for them.

Convicted youths are the most common offenders of the regime and active participants in all types of prison subcultural activities. They spontaneously involve in the distribution and consumption of alcohol and drugs, as well as in group excesses, mass protests, disobedience and rebellion.

### 3.2.2. *Treatment*

Corrective actions with convicted youths should be aimed at limiting their criminalization and creating more opportunities for positive expression related to education, vocational training, employment, maintaining physical fitness and constructive self-improvement over other prisoners. If all this is comprehensively and systematically realized, this could lead to a change in their value orientations, to balanced self-esteem and positivism of their actual motivation and psychological states. In such changes, they will be isolated from the prison subculture, will seek

useful communal expression and strengthen and develop positive social contacts with their relatives, friends and intimate partners.

### *3.2.3. Expected results*

Positive results can actually be achieved in regulating overcrowding of prisons and implementation of coherent and focused approach to convicted youths to be combined with dosed and fair and external control, adequate and systematic mass events with relaxation-entertainment character and well-organized training and labour activities for effective rationalization of their leisure time.

## **3.3. Personality-psychological portrait and treatment of convicted adults**

### *3.3.1. Psychological portrait*

Adulthood covers the time range from 35 to 60 years. During this age period personality is professionally affirmed, builds its career, accumulates life experience. On the one hand, mental powers and abilities of the individual strengthen, but on the other hand, in the later adulthood appear signs of reproduction abilities limitation, emerge disturbances in mental and physical health, biological capacity is reduced, slowing the rate of response, appear difficulties in intense business activity. There is an increased need for rest (Hadjiolova et al., 1984; Georgiev, 2008). All these trends are offset individually and this depends on personal motivation and opportunities (Pencheva, 2011).

Adults convicted have shaped life plans and goals. They have a well-defined status and place within the prison institution. For them, values such as material prosperity, health, family and receipt of psychological support are important. They are tired of the criminal lifestyle and are disinterested in terms of criminal romantics, though outwardly they comply with existing prison subculture norms and interactions (Dmitriev & Kazak, 2007).

With a part of the prisoners from the age group considered proceeds a modification of their social roles because of the collapse of their relations with the family or as a result of activation of these contacts. They are in the process of reassessment of values, critical reflection to the past life, negative assessment of their surroundings and actions, self-esteem becomes more realistic and balanced. The analysed category of convicts who are in adulthood tend to positively reorient, avoid prison subcultural groups, strengthen their personal status and make significant efforts for their own material wellbeing, health, family, children (Ushatkov, 2003).

Among prisoners aged 35 to 60 years there are many recidivists, characterized by pessimistic attitude towards one's own life, mistrust, bitterness and aggression to all people surrounding them. They are well embedded in the prison environment and have acquired the characteristics of the institutional client, and therefore have lost their volitional qualities and stereotypes for elementary self-organization. For these reasons, they are in continuous need of support and guidance. The mentioned unfavourable changes are the result of their too long stay in penitentiary establishments (Ushatkov, 2003; Madzharov, 2006). Among the repeatedly convicted recidivists there are persons who, in free life conditions have not only committed criminal acts – mostly different kinds of thefts – but have also been wandering and begging for a long time. They usually feature lower intellectual level, primitive interests and motives, decreased self-esteem, self-control deficit and propensity for impulsive response.

Among repeatedly convicted offenders aged 35 to 60 years we can easily identify those who have extremely negative attitude towards the penitentiary institution and the justice system. They are aggressive, cynical, unbalanced, explosive, angry and completely integrated into the criminal prison subculture. Their values orientation is expressly asocial, their self-esteem is high and unbalanced and their dominating mental states of frustration set their tendency to aggressive actions and angry reactions.

Apparently, among convicted recidivists who have reached adulthood, three groups of individuals may be differentiated. In the first one there is a marked positive reorientation, pragmatic values, realistic self-esteem, enhancement of motivation for maintaining connections with the family, termination with criminal past and isolation

from prison subcultural groups and forms of activity. This category of prisoners must be actively supported and its opportunities for employment, vocational training, participation in correctional programs and amateur forms of prison self-management must be increased. To them should more actively be applied the institute of conditional early release and re-categorization, i.e. bringing them to more lightweight penitentiary institution with lighter regime and more opportunities for re-socialization.

In the second group of recidivists we refer those tired of the criminal activity, the ones disappointed of their own life and destiny, with decreased self-esteem and activity. They are distant, exist for themselves, do not have enough positive social contacts and manifest passivity and conformity to traditional prison interactions. These features of theirs allow them to be successfully isolated from typical subcultural activities, including them more intensely in cultural-informational, training and employment activities. They are suitable for inclusion in psych correction groups, encouraging personal growth and positive self-esteem. The advisory work with them should be actively aimed at strengthening and developing contacts with their relatives, as well as creating a positive environment within the penitentiary institution. For this purpose, they can also be categorized and sent in the open types of penitentiary establishments to finish their sentences.

In the third group are the extremely negative-minded recidivists, with generalized antisocial values, high and inadequate self-esteem and negative attitudes towards law enforcement institutions and to penitentiary establishments. Their subcultural activities must be directly sanctioned. It is advisory that they should be secluded to some extent from the prison self-management and be so accommodated in the residential area so as to have less negative impact particularly on younger inmates. Meanwhile, efforts should also be made to restore the contacts with their relatives and their families. In some cases, as my personal practice suggests, this can lead to significant change and the previously embittered, alienated and hostile person may acquire another type of attitudes, motivations and behavioural orientation. In this sense, the more problematic category of adult inmates in question should not unambiguously and categorically be placed in the group of convicted who are not subjects to correction. It is entirely possible that they may also evolve, but it is largely dependent on the characteristics of the existential situation of each of them and of its specific and personalized experience.

### *3.3.2. Treatment*

The treatment of adult convicted should be carried out differentiated, according to their readiness to change and their fatigue from criminal activity and serving the punishment. In case of positive attitude, their personal growth and options for positive expression and commitment should be supported. Their contacts with relatives in middle aged individuals with expressed negative and antisocial values should be carefully monitored and promoted, in order to seek opportunities for constructive change to them as well. It is then appropriate that they be reasonably punished and, if necessary, isolated from other prisoners.

### *3.3.3.Expected results*

Consequently, with adults convicted emerges a willingness to avoid mental overload caused by the inclusion in criminal activities related to the prison subculture and the development of the criminal career. They seek greater stability in material and family perspective. This category of prisoners is prone to reassess the past and an enhanced critical self-reflection and dissatisfaction regarding one's own life. All this leads to the possibility of positive reorientation and change in this group of prisoners in adulthood.

## **3.4. Personal-psychological portrait and treatment of elderly convicts**

### *3.4.1. Psychological portrait*

Elderly people, who are older than 65 years represent about 9% of the world population, which equates to 600 million people. Similar is the percentage presence of elderly people in prison populations (Todorova, 2010).



Perhaps, it will maintain stable, as the prison community in isomorphic terms repeats the age characteristics of society in which in the recent past 6% of the people lived to 65 years. Currently, citizens are characterized by greater life expectancy and live almost a quarter of a century after their 65 anniversary (Todorova, 2010). Given this objective trend which is valid also for the prison population, and as a consequence of the increase in the number of life prisoners, the number of elderly people, serving penalty will increase.

Ageing is accompanied by biological, psychological and social regression. Physical fitness is visibly reduced, reaction time increases, hearing, smell, perception of distance decrease, the memory for names is limited, and the ability for quick thinking decreases. With age, there is a better memory of events occurring immediately and those which have happened long ago. In this, important information is well updated, and the accumulation of knowledge and skills remains (Todorova, 2010).

Studies show that in old age are observed changes in “crystallized” and “fluid” intelligence. On this basis, difficulties arise in the process of acquisition and reproduction of knowledge (Klinchanski, 2007).

In human aging, major changes occur in their socio-psychological environment. In this period of time people lose their relatives and friends, their sexual activity is reduced, their social contacts and activities decrease (Klinchanski, 2007). The ageing person increasingly encapsulates, more tangibly feels the impending death, fixes on one's vital functions and health problems. With this alienation, selfishness, hatred deepen, with growing cynical candor and lower morality (Klinchanski, 2007). These trends are largely found among aging prisoners.

In old age, even opportunities to meet the daily requirements decrease (Hadjiolova et al., 1984). This is especially pressing in aging inmates who must reside in an environment filled with many restrictions, deficit and deprivation. With ageing convicted, as with all people, height is reduced, mental plasticity is lost, adaptation even to minor changes occurs difficultly (Georgiev, 2010; Gergov & Asenova, 2012).

Research on early old age outlines the existence of considerable stress due to lack of prospects, new realities, multiple deficits, stigma of the aging individual as unnecessary and the increasingly hypertrophied sense of death (Gergov & Asenova, 2012; Todorova, 2010). All these causes and effects of existential frustration are especially expressed with convicted aging in places of imprisonment.

With convicted recidivists over 65 years, with the ageing, starts a fixation on their own health and satisfaction of physiological needs. For them, these are the leading reasons that exacerbate their concerns for the future when they will be free, but will most likely have serious problems finding a suitable housing and with their own sustenance.

After the age of 65 the convicted move little, prefer stereotype environment and exhibit irritability and negativity to suddenly emerging changes (Dmitriev & Kazak, 2007). They have a narrow range of communication in the penitentiary institution itself and their external contacts are completely absent due to disintegrated marriages or death of spouse or partner.

The already described adverse changes in the functioning of cognitive processes in the elderly are typical also for inmates. They also display abnormalities in memory and attention, difficulties in orientation in more complicated situations. They become hostile and aggressive toward their surroundings, exhibit avarice, increased egocentricity, resentment and increased irritability with increasing emotional stress. Elderly prisoners are distinguished with high anxiety, suspicion, distrust of the other convicted and concerns that they may be cheated (Dmitriev & Kazak, 2007).

My own observations and psycho-diagnostic research, conducted with convicted over the age of 65 confirm the finding that they at times also fall into states of sadness and sorrow, but more often are depressed, anxious, irritable and even frightened. Of this category of prisoners are also inherent the common affective disruptions, as well as individual manifestations of pathological sexual inclinations.

Compensations among elderly people convicted are individual and have certain limits, since a large part of the upcoming degenerative changes in physiological and psychological terms are irreversible.

### *3.4.2. Treatment*

Part of the convicted from the considered age category are very well adapted to the penitentiary institution. They have the characteristics inherent to institutionalized clients and their external social contacts are completely decomposed. They often do not wish to be released even when they have served their term of punishment, as in

freedom they are lonely, unsupported and defenseless before the dangers and challenges threatening their health and existence.

Prisoners over 65 are usually reconciled with their conviction and destiny and obey to the existing regime and internal order, but in some cases because of negativity, irritability and affective attack can demonstrate disobedience or conflict with another prisoner or an employee of the administration. In these cases, the conduct of individual counseling is enough to restore their balance and self-control. It is appropriate that they be sanctioned disciplinary only upon attempts to open physical aggression or violent sexual advances when actually there is no criminal act committed.

If particular prisoners over 65 are a source of negative influence and conflicts with respect to other prisoners, they may be isolated for a certain period of time, but this should be a temporary measure, as their seclusion from other prisoners deepens their own disadaptation and de-socialization.

Convicted elderly with character accentuations, chronic diseases, long-term prison sentences or lifetime conviction should be periodically monitored, diagnosed and placed on maintenance therapy, so as to predict and control their potential emotional crashes, affective outbursts, conflict collisions and even suicidal attempts.

#### *3.4.3. Expected results*

Age-psychological characteristics of the convicted in the category concerned suggests that they be placed on a preserving penitentiary treatment while, if necessary, psycho-diagnostics, individual counseling, and in some cases – also crisis intervention are conducted in respect of them to balance their negative mental states and relieve their daily adaptation and functioning in penitentiary establishments.

## **4. Conclusion**

The interpretation of publications on penitentiary psychology, developmental psychology, general psychology and penalistics, as well as the analysis of my own psycho-diagnostics, consultative work and observations over different age categories of convicted from the Bulgarian prison population make possible to draw the following conclusions:

1. Crisis age-psychological phenomena and diffusion identity with minor prisoners, the accelerated, contradictory and unharmonious development and performances of convicted young cause their involvement with the criminal career and their inclusion in the prison subculture. This requires complex influence on them to stimulate their positive personal growth by limiting criminalization and structuring sustainable positive social similar objectives and prospects.

2. With adult prisoners there is a recognized status in the prison community, disappointment and fatigue of the criminal career and distancing from prison subculture. Their penitentiary treatment and correction is aimed at restoration and development of their positive social contacts with their relatives and to constructive reflection on their disappointment and frustration.

3. With elderly convicted, biological and socio-psychological regression is observed, amplified by the effects of penitentiary isolation. Their basic mental functions weaken, appears a pronounced fixation on their own health and functioning and an expressed stereotype behaviour. Their penitentiary treatment has a preserving focus and includes supportive counseling and therapeutics.

Among the minors incarcerated and convicted youths, the treatment and correction in places of detention are aimed at preventing them from further criminalization and stimulation of personal development, education and vocational training. With the adult convicts, the accents in penitentiary treatment have other dimensions. For them, it is essential to have social support by their relatives and the penitentiary administration. Correction goals and objectives are placed only within a limited range of adulthood, and with the elderly convicted it is essential to receive self-preservation treatment, and counseling and crisis interventions are part of it and have supportive functions.



There is an obvious existence of age-psychological specificity in different age groups of prisoners, which also sets the profile of their penitentiary treatment. This confirms our research hypothesis and proves the merits of the proposed theoretical and conceptual model which summarizes different fragments contained in specialized publications and empirical observations that relate to the age-psychological portrait and penitentiary treatment of various segments of the prison population.

The developed age-psychological model allows to outline the essential aspects of the differential treatment of prisoners. Its practical use can seriously contribute for intensification of individual interventions in the work with convicts and to enhance the effectiveness of rehabilitative work with them in Bulgarian penitentiary institutions.

The application of age-psychological approach to the treatment of prisoners is fully in line with the European recommendations for improving the execution of imprisonment and its fuller humanization.

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